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CHAPTER ONE

ACCESS TO AND RE-USE OF PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION
Brian Fitzgerald

On the back of the growing capacity of networked digital information technologies to process and visualise large amounts of information in a timely, efficient and user driven manner we have seen an increasing demand for better access to and re-use of public sector information (PSI). The story is not a new one. Share knowledge and together we can do great things; limit access and we reduce the potential for opportunity.

For much of this decade policymakers, consumers, industry representatives and scholars all over the world have been attempting to highlight the importance of better access to and re-use of PSI. Every domain we inhabit is impacted by this issue, yet questions of life and death – health, the environment (climate change and water) and emergency services – have made it much more obvious in the eyes of politicians. In Australia devastating natural disasters such as cyclones and bushfires have made it clear to policymakers that in the Internet age the ability to access and re-use PSI is now a key ingredient of information management.

During 2007, 2008 and 2009 we have seen a significant push towards a global information policy that promotes better access to and re-use of PSI. While we are still short of an international treaty on the issue the OECD's *Declaration on the Future of the Internet Economy* and its associated *Recommendation of the Council for Enhanced Access and More Effective Use of Public Sector Information*[1] represent a strong international consensus. These have since been supported in principle by the policies and practices of President Obama,[2] the Cutler Review of the Australia National Innovation System in its report titled *Venturous Australia – building strength in innovation,*[3] the Power of Information Advisory Taskforce in the UK,[4] the Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee (EDIC) of the Victorian Parliament's report *Inquiry into Improving*

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[1] www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/27/40826024.pdf.

[2] See for example: *Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies: Transparency and Open Government* (January 2009) www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment. See also the Open Government Initiative (OGI) www.whitehouse.gov/open, and the Open Government Directive www.whitehouse.gov/open/documents/open-government-directive.

[3] www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Pages/home.aspx. See further Commonwealth of Australia, 'Powering Ideas: an innovation agenda for the 21st century' www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Pages/home.aspx; Minister Kim Carr 'There is More than One Way to Innovate' 7 Feb 2008 minister.industry.gov.au/SenatortheHonKimCarr/Pages; Minister Kim Carr 'Launch of the Review of the National Innovation System Report – *Venturous Australia*' www.melbourne.org.au/media-centre/in-the-news/post/speech-by-senator-the-hon-kim-carr-review-of-the-national-innovation-system-report-venturous-australia.; K Dearne, 'Tanner eyes web 2.0 tools', *Australian IT*, 4 November 2008 www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,27574,24601440-15306,00.html.

[4] powerofinformation.wordpress.com. By way of background see: T Steinberg and E Mayo, *Power of Information Review* www.opsi.gov.uk/advice/poi/index.

Access to Victorian Public Sector Information and Data (2009)[5] and the Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce's report *Engage – Getting on with Government 2.0*.[6]

The two volumes of this book seek to explain and analyse this global shift in the way we manage public sector information. In doing so they collect and present papers, reports and submissions on the topic by the leading authors and institutions from across the world. These in turn will provide people tasked with mapping out and implementing information policy with reference material and practical guidance.

Volume 1 draws together papers on the topic by policymakers, academics and practitioners while Volume 2 presents a selection of the key reports and submissions that have been presented over the last few years.

A key conclusion that emerges from much of this literature – and is succinctly stated in the OECD PSI principles – is that, as a default rule, public sector information should be made available through technical formats and licences that promote access and re-use under transparent and sensible pricing mechanisms. For many this means that PSI should be:

- (subject to legal and any other appropriate considerations) made public
- priced as close as possible to zero
- licensed under generic/standard and Internet-enabled open content licences such as Creative Commons
- accessible in raw form and presented in re-usable (and open) technical formats.

Yet, as much of the literature in this book highlights, to achieve the goal of greater openness, access and re-use we need to build and implement information policies (and where necessary laws) to support and promote the requirements listed above. Therefore, while the end game may have become clearer much work remains to be done in embedding access to PSI in our everyday lives. The best practice principles and projects that are outlined and examined in this book provide guidance on how we might sensibly set about and fulfil this task in an ever changing world.

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[5] www.parliament.vic.gov.au/edic/inquiries/access_to_PSI/default.htm.

[6] www.gov2.net.au.